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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ZI](#) [TZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT KIKWETE'S MARCH 15 MEETING WITH
ZIMBABWE'S PRESIDENT MUGABE TO INITIATE SADC'S
RECONCILIATION EFFORT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Pamela White for reasons 1.4(b,d)

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) On March 16, Tanzania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bernard Membe, briefed Charge Pamela White, the Canadian High Commissioner and a select group of European ambassadors on the outcome of President Kikwete's March 15 trip to Harare for intense, closed-door discussions with President Robert Mugabe on a "new way forward" for Zimbabwe. Membe said President Kikwete and South Africa's President Mbeki had agreed to a coordinated Southern African Development Community (SADC) strategy, with Tanzania taking the lead on discussions with Mugabe and South Africa ready to reach out to Zimbabwe's opposition party leaders. Membe stressed that aim of the SADC effort is to end the suffering of Zimbabwe's citizens by focusing only on internal, good governance issues with Mugabe. "SADC has a timetable and we will move forward steadily," Membe stressed, asking that other countries give this new SADC effort time--"a breathing space"--of one to three months, before launching efforts in other fora to address the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe.

12. (C) While not disclosing details of the options that Kikwete and Mugabe addressed, Membe said the discussions were frank, and President Kikwete emerged from the meeting very optimistic that Mugabe is ready to cooperate with this initiative. Membe said that the next meeting of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, which Tanzania currently chairs, will be in Dar es Salaam March 25 to 27; details of the SADC strategy for Zimbabwe will be discussed and decided during that session. Membe also made an appeal to European diplomats to invite President Mugabe to the next EU-Africa Summit, scheduled for Fall 2007 in Portugal, so that human rights and democracy concerns about Zimbabwe can be discussed openly with "Mugabe in the room." Both the U.K. and the EU representatives proposed to "wait and see" for the next few months to ascertain if SADC initiative is making headway or not before making that decision. End summary.

Briefing to Select Group of Diplomats

13. (C) Minister Membe said he chose to meet in person with the envoys of the U.S., Canada, U.K., France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and the EU, before MFA released its official announcement on President Kikwete's March 15 meeting with President Mugabe. "I want to give you more details than will be in the press release," he noted. Membe said that President Kikwete had promised Mugabe at the January 2007 African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa that they would meet again once Kikwete returned from his European tour. However, the violent events of March 11 and 12, prompted Kikwete to visit Harare now rather than later. He fully briefed Mugabe on what he had heard from capitals of European countries regarding Zimbabwe. Membe reiterated that that Kikwete had no intention to address land reform with Mugabe, a complicated issue on which some African nations are sympathetic to Zimbabwe's position. "President Kikwete's goal was to address good governance and human rights concerns, as internal Zimbabwean issues, and not discuss ongoing disputes with the United Kingdom or any other nation." Membe counted as a success that through the March 15 meeting, Mugabe understood that SADC wants to only focus on and work to resolve Zimbabwe's governance problems.

14. (C) Minister Membe said that Kikwete first "heard out" Mugabe on the economic and political challenges Zimbabwe is facing: inflation at nearly 1700 percent, an impossible foreign exchange rate, and daily life becoming "unbearable" for most Zimbabweans. Mugabe also gave his side of the March 11-12 incidents that had outraged the international community. Kikwete then broached with Mugabe that the status quo cannot continue and the time is "right" to move toward reconciliation between the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) and the opposition and to address Zimbabwe's governance woes. According to Membe, President Mugabe showed a "commitment" to

DAR ES SAL 00000375 002 OF 003

work toward such a resolution.

Plea to "Give us some breathing room"

15. (C) Membe expressed the GOT's "fear" that unless the international community has "faith in" this SADC initiative and gives it time to bear fruit, other options for change in Zimbabwe might be proposed that could "discredit or impede" progress in this new reconciliation effort. "We are appealing that you give this effort some breathing room," he reiterated. Membe added that "regime change is difficult; it takes tolerance and patience" giving the only hint that the Kikwete-Mugabe closed door discussions may have included exploring the possibilities that Mugabe might consider power-sharing or even stepping aside. However, when queried, Membe said he could not disclose any details of what was actually discussed, except the that focus was on internal reconciliation.

Tanzania will work with Mugabe; South Africa with the opposition

16. (C) Minister Membe said while President Kikwete wanted to meet with the opposition leaders, the occasion did not present itself during this trip. "At present, tempers are still very high." Kikwete's main objective March 15 was to "break the ice" with President Mugabe and get him to agree to cooperate with the SADC reconciliation initiative. Membe emphasized that Presidents Kikwete and Mbeki have agreed to closely cooperate: Kikwete will initially be the interlocutor with President Mugabe and Mbeki with the opposition. Thus, South Africa plans to meet with the Zimbabwe opposition parties very soon. On March 25 to 27, the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security will meet in Dar es Salaam and develop a straight forward, step-by-step strategy to resolve the Zimbabwe crisis. Membe noted that he anticipates President Kikwete will make many trips to Harare and, when the time is right, also meet with opposition leaders.

Important "carrot": Invite Mugabe to EU-Africa Summit

¶7. (C) Minister Membe emphasized more than once that the EU leaders should consider inviting Mugabe to the EU-Africa Summit in October 2007. He said that neither AU nor SADC leaders believe in isolating Zimbabwe. "We need to engage President Mugabe, to keep talking to him; that is the only way to know the situation in Zimbabwe and move toward a resolution." Membe said that inviting Mugabe to the EU-Africa summit would be a "win-win": first, it could assure that nearly all African nations would attend the summit, since many would refuse to attend if Zimbabwe was shunned; and, more importantly, it would allow a discussion on human rights and democracy in Zimbabwe to take place with Mugabe in the room and listening. "No progress can be made if we discuss Zimbabwe's human rights situation and they are not even there," Membe said. He reported that Kikwete had told Mugabe if he were invited to attend the EU-Africa summit, he needs to know that Zimbabwe's human rights record would be discussed; Mugabe appeared comfortable with that possibility.

¶8. (C) Both the Charge of the United Kingdom and the EU Ambassador suggested to Minister Membe that the decision on whether Zimbabwe be invited to the Fall 2007 EU-Africa summit in Lisbon, could be better addressed after seeing whether Mugabe is cooperating with the new SADC initiative or not. Membe insisted that the invitation should not be contingent on progress in this internal reconciliation effort, but be extended as a "carrot" to encourage and coax a serious response from President Mugabe to address governance and human rights concerns.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) While Minister Membe would not reveal any specifics

DAR ES SAL 00000375 003 OF 003

on what Kikwete and Mugabe discussed, he stressed that talks were "frank, spirited and down to earth" in seeking a way forward from the status quo. Membe said President Kikwete is very optimistic: "If you could have seen his face this morning, he looked like the happiest man alive." Membe's plea to the Western diplomats was loud and clear: give us enough time to let SADC develop a strategy and make progress. He stressed that if efforts to solve the crisis in Zimbabwe are made from both inside and outside Africa at the same time, there is the risk of a "collision."

¶10. (C) Both the United Kingdom's Charge and the Canadian High Commissioner confirmed to Charge White in a brief follow-on meeting that Minister Membe had referred to "regime change" in describing options that might be on the table in this SADC reconciliation effort. However, the envoys agreed that the March 15 Kikwete-Mugabe meeting was just an small step in a very long process. While Kikwete has a successful track record in reconciliation efforts in both Burundi and the Congo (DRC), even Minister Membe admitted that President Mugabe often overreacts when facing the press, with his words, actions and mind "far apart." Membe promised to keep the Western diplomats fully briefed, beginning with an outbrief following the March 25 to 27 SADC Organ on Defence and Security meeting in Dar es Salaam.

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